

Pflugerville ballot items would change city's public notice requirements

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The City of Pflugerville said charter amendment items on the Nov. 8 ballot would allow officials to save money by reducing the number of public notices that must run in area newspapers.

Five of the 11 charter proposals relate to public notices. The new charter would allow such notices be published in electronic media — such as the city's website — instead, saving \$1,562 a year, city officials said. A charter review committee recommended the move.

"We decided that if it didn't have to be posted based on state laws and regulations, that posting on the official website would be sufficient," said committee Chairman Charles Colley . "The primary driver was a cost savings to the city."

Under the proposed changes, the city would no longer publish notices in the newspaper for proposed ordinances, ordinances going into effect, public hearings or decisions on public utility franchises. City spokeswoman Terri Waggoner said the review committee consulted with the city attorney to ensure the changes would not violate state laws.

The city publishes the required public notices in the Pflugerville Pflag, a publication of Austin Community Newspapers. The paper is owned by Cox Media Group, which also owns the American-Statesman. One of the charter amendment proposals would allow the city to publish required notices in the Statesman or the Pflag.

"It's not to say we won't publish in the Pflag when timelines allow, but we'll publish in the Statesman when it's convenient," said Floyd Akers , the former city attorney who advised the charter amendments.

Bennett Sandlin , executive director of the Texas Municipal League, said it is not uncommon for municipalities to reduce the number of items that their charters require public notice of in newspapers within the limits of state law to reduce costs.

Although newspapers have traditionally been the primary means for distributing public notices, Colley said the committee discussed whether removing public notices from the newspaper would be negatively affect those without computers and determined there is sufficient public access, such as at libraries.

However, Jason Jarrett , the operations director for Austin Community Newspapers, said the change would reduce information available to some residents.

"If we don't have access to public notices in newspapers, the information that needs to be in front of citizens will not be there," Jarrett said. "Not too many citizens go to the city website for any sort of news, so you'll have citizens that are just unaware of new developments."

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